



COVER LETTER **GUIDEBOOK**

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COVER LETTER GUIDE

Your cover letters must do more than introduce you to a potential employer. You must make a strong, memorable impression. A successful cover letter is compelling, persuasive, and illuminates your unique personality and accomplishments. Something about your letter must distinguish you from all the other candidates. Think of this as your one and only opportunity to motivate an employer to call you for an interview. In the brief time it took for you to read this paragraph, an employer has scanned your letter AND resume and made a decision.

Anatomy of a Cover Letter

FIRST PARAGRAPH

What are you applying for? How did you learn about the job?
What makes you the best candidate? What is your brand?
Would you be selected if ONLY the first paragraph was read?

SECOND PARAGRAPH

State your interest. Highlight 1 or 2 achievements that connects you best with the school's mission, demographics or strengths

WRAP IT UP

Express one final strong statement of interest and your gratitude

5 Steps to effective, convincing cover letters

STEP 1: Define Your Assets: Inspire Interest

STEP 2: Employer Needs: Recognize Requirements

STEP 3: Form and Formality: First Impressions

STEP 4: Share Your Brand: Write Away

STEP 5: The End: Finish in Style

*Are you gone in
60 seconds, or
will your letter
earn an
interview?*

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STEP ONE Define Your Brand: Inspire Interest

- Jot down 3-4 words that describe **who** you are at work? Are you energetic or steady? Collaborative or independent? Analytical or creative? Think about how your peers see you. Have you chosen 3-4 words they would instantly agree with?
- Jot down 1 word that defines **how** you produce work? Do you counsel or serve? Lead, manage, or supervise? Do you examine or solve? Do you instruct or motivate? Choose a meaningful *action* verb that powerfully captures your operating style.
- In 3-4 words define **what** results you achieve. Do you improve the quality of care for HIV/AIDS patients? Do you strive to improve the grades of ADHD students? Do you develop goals and plan college pathways for urban students? Think carefully about what your desired impact is on people and in your work.

Combine the who, how and what into your personal mission statement, your brand. Your brand should skillfully reflect your unique abilities, interests and values.

YOUR BRAND SHOULD INSPIRE NOT JUST INFORM!

STRONG BRAND STATEMENT: I am a dedicated life-long learner and team teacher who empowers diverse students commitment to achievement by connecting math instruction with real life problems.

WEAK BRAND STATEMENT: I am an experienced teacher with strong skills in classroom management and math.

Now, you try:

Keep it short, authentic and COMMANDING. Read it out loud. Are you believing it?

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STEP TWO Employer Needs: Recognize Requirements

Employers are overwhelmed with applications. Will your letter convince them you can be a unique and significant asset to their team?

- Read the job description thoroughly. Using a highlighter, mark the words that stand out to you as being key employer needs. Do they need a Masters or advanced degree, flexible, resourceful team player willing to serve diverse students' academic needs?
- In side by side columns, match the job requirements and mission statement of the company with the elements of your brand. How do your interests, abilities and values align with the employer? Be creative, but accurate. If the job calls for a Master's degree you don't have, point out your ten years of relevant experience.

EMPLOYER NEEDS:

Flexible
Team player
Culturally sensitive
Master of Arts

MY BRAND

Creative Learner-Educator
MVP: Math Team Leader 2012
Success with diverse, low income students
Ten years experience

STEP THREE Form & Formality: First Impressions

The last time you received a letter addressed to "Occupant" what did you do? Did you tear it open, eager to read it? Or, more likely, trash it?

Employers, like people, appreciate the effort of a personal touch. While it can be challenging, make an effort to identify, by name, the head of recruiting or the office where you would like to work. Instead of "Dear HR Person", look online or call the employer and explain you wish to be polite so would appreciate having a name to whom you can address a letter. Ready to write?

Make sure your font, contact information and format exactly matches your resume.

- Maintain a margin of .5-1.0. Crowding reflects you have difficulty being concise. A vast expanse of white page suggests you have nothing to say.
- Font size should be legible and consistent. While you may want to shrink to a 9 point font and add creatively themed borders, have respect for the person reading dozens of letters.
- You want to showcase your exceptional competency through content, not distract an employer with fun, creative ClipArt.

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STEP FOUR Share Your Brand: Write Away!

Having defined your key assets and matched them to the employer's needs, the next step is to draft your letter.

- The first paragraph of your cover letter is the key. In three to four, clear sentences you must answer: What are you applying for? How did you learn about the job? What is your brand? And, why your brand makes you the best candidate? Ask yourself: **WILL I BE SELECTED IF THE EMPLOYER ONLY READS THE FIRST PARAGRAPH?**
- Paragraph one should focus on the employer's mission and needs. This means avoiding sentences that begin with "I am the perfect fit ... I have the skills ... I can do the job". Prompt employer interest in your talent by showing you understand what they need.

EXAMPLE: *"For the past year I have collaborated with a team of exceptional professionals dedicated to improving math interest and ability in a school with a majority of English Language Learners. My mentor and your colleague, Dr. Johns, encouraged me to apply for your open Algebra II position. Having just earned a Teacher of the County award and after a decade at Washington High School, I am ready for a new challenge. I am eager to contribute to your team's important work assuring students confidently navigate cultural transitions and achieve academic success."*

- Your second paragraph should showcase your competencies by sharing one or two achievements. Use language that is persuasive and meaningful. This is not a laundry list of records or trophies. This is an affirmation of your brand and what motivates you.

EXAMPLE: *"Last year I chose a demanding schedule and managed 6 classes a day in Algebra II and Geometry. With a minimum of 25 students in each class, it might seem hard to know and understand each teen's learning style to assure individual success. With that goal in mind, I paired students of mixed abilities to foster team work and assure comprehension of each individual while maintaining the interest of the entire class. By term's end, every student had measurably improved their grades. The real joy, however, was the strong sense of community the team approach created."*

- Wrap up the letter with a strong expression of clear interest in serving and supporting the stated employer organizational goals. Close by expressing gratitude! Thank you.

EXAMPLE. *"In sum, I would welcome the opportunity to serve on your team at Jackson High School. With your state wide reputation of accelerating achievement, I hope to bring my ten years of teaching experience to continue and strengthen your commitment to each student. I am grateful for your consideration of my application."*

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STEP FIVE The End: Finish in Style

You now have a clear idea of what makes a good letter great. Read it a few times, then put it away for the night, and read it again - OUT LOUD - in the morning.

- Would this be the letter you would be comfortable letting a trusted friend read? Would it inspire a cynical, overworked employer's interest in *less than 30 seconds*? Does it truthfully capture your brand? (Step 1)
- Does it recognize and reflect exactly what the employer tells you he needs? (Step 2)
- Do you make a strong first impression with format and formalities? (Step 3)
- Do you specifically and clearly connect your past record of achievement to the employer's mission and future success? (Step 4)
- If you are confident in your answers to these questions, you have finished in style!

To sum up, keep the following in mind:

- Nothing screams "I don't care" like typos, spelling and grammar errors. Please proofread. Then, proofread again. Read it out loud to check for authenticity and clarity. If it sounds strained or goofy to you, an employer will feel the same.
- Generic letters that describe *your* view of *your* skills will generate a generic response. Your letter should be specific to your abilities, the organization's mission, the hiring manager's name, and the requirements of the position of interest.
- You are applying for a specific job. Skip the distracting, exhausting details of your weekend volunteer activities and trophies in soccer, unless, of course, you are applying to be a soccer coach.
- Your cover letter can be both a first and lasting impression. Please make it count.

COVER LETTER SAMPLE

Below you can see how the cover letter TRACKS and MATCHES the key, highlighted words in this job description. Almost every phrase and line of the letter connects directly to a requirement in the job description.

JOB DESCRIPTION

Whitfield Jr-Sr High School, in Bethel Vermont, is seeking a highly qualified (A) Math teacher. Strong candidates will have skills and experience improving performance (B) and teaching middle school and early high school students. Flexible, (C) creative (D), dynamic, (E) and enthusiastic team players (F) with a strong background in teaching students of diverse backgrounds (G) are preferred. EOE. Please submit letter of interest, resume to attention: Mr. John Potter, Superintendent

YOUR LETTER

Dear Superintendent Potter:

For the past year I have collaborated with a team (F) of exceptional professionals dedicated to improving math interest and ability (B) in a school with a majority of English Language Learners. (G) My mentor and your colleague, Dr. Johns, encouraged me to apply for your open Algebra II position. Having just earned a Teacher of the County award and after a decade (A) at Washington High School, I am ready for a new challenge. I am eager to contribute to your team's (F) important work assuring students confidently navigate cultural transitions (G) and achieve academic success. (B)

Last year I chose a demanding schedule (E) and managed 6 classes a day in Algebra II and Geometry. With a minimum of 25 students in each class, it might seem hard to know and understand each teen's learning style to assure individual success.(B, C) With that goal in mind, I paired students of mixed abilities (C, D) to foster team work (F) and assure comprehension (B) of each individual while maintaining progress and interest (B, C) of the entire class. By term's end, every student had measurably improved (B) their grades. The real joy(F), however, was the strong sense of community (F) the team approach created.

In sum, I would welcome the opportunity to serve on your team (F) at Whitfield Junior-Senior High School. With your state wide reputation of accelerating achievement, it would be an honor to bring my ten years of teaching (B) experience to continue and strengthen your commitment (B, F) to each student. I am deeply grateful for your consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

Jenifer Jones